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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
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RULGPIA/USCOMSOLANT

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WHA/EPSC
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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY IN ARGENTINA; ECUADOR; 12/29/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Most local papers extensively report on Argentine President Nestor Kirchner coordinating a manhunt for a human rights witness, who went missing on Wednesday after accusing last year former police officer Luis Patti of torturing him in 1972. Local dailies highlight that authorities are still looking for another human rights witness who disappeared more than three months ago. Leading "Clarín" carries an opinion piece by its political editor underscoring that "the case poses a challenge and inflicts an offense on the Government and the entire society."

2. OPINION PIECES

- "A gloomy challenge is posed to (Argentina's) Government and its entire society"

Julio Blanck, political columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (12/29) "When Julio Lopez disappeared, there were hesitations and conspiracy theories about the reasons - some unbelievable theories shifted the blame on the victim. One hundred days have passed since then and there is no news about Lopez... With the disappearance of Luis Gerez, President Kirchner, Governor Sola and Minister Anibal Fernandez were soon notified, and everyone turned to one direction - that of a kidnapping.

"The fact that Gerez was a follower of Kirchner and was attending a political meeting when kidnapped contributed (to the immediate awareness by the Government that he had been kidnapped). We should not disregard the fact that kidnappers acted under those circumstances with the purpose of intensifying the feeling that three decades away from the latest military dictatorship, the 'inhabitants' of that 'gloominess' can go unpunished today. This is the overwhelming message conveyed by Gerez's disappearance, witness testifying against former police officer Luis Patti...

"The message hits the Government. It is a major test to the chore of its human rights policy which along with the performance of the economy makes up the cornerstone of Kirchner's success. But it would be stupid to understand this as a political arm-wrestling... between the leftovers of State terrorism and the current government.

"... Authorities are responsible for the resolution of the case... However, the case poses a challenge and inflicts an offense on the entire society... As never before, staying indifferent now is a way of taking sides."

- "An acid test for Ecuador"

Leading "Clarín" carries an op-ed piece by Hector Rubini, an economist and professor at Universidad Argentina de la Empresa and Nacional University of General Sarmiento, who writes (12/29) "On

January 15, Rafael Correa will take over as President of Ecuador. He will find it hard to put the country on the right track. The reasons why Ecuador lost its direction are not easy to understand.

"... Correa's first months of government will be an acid test for him - he will attempt to call a Constituent Assembly and establish a foreign policy that is far from Washington, which will not be easy.

"Nonetheless, the real challenge will be to revisit the State and struggle against corruption. On the domestic front, he will have to abide by the main principle of the indigenous culture 'you should not steal, lie or beg? loaf.' On the economic front, the main social claim is related to preserving stability, creating jobs, eradicating poverty and recovering the 'culture' of lending.

"... Not few people bet on (Correa's) failure, but this would imply the regrettable return of well-known politicians who have ruined Ecuador.

"The focus of attention is not 'to dollarize or not to do it.' but rather the eradication of demagoguery, bribery and corruption. It will not be easy, but with almost 50 percent of Ecuadorians underemployed and with claims of all kinds, (Correa) will have to give out a clear sign right from his first day in office."

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